

Colossians ALC Winter 2018-2019

Class Five: January 6, 2019 // *In Him You Are Made Complete* // Colossians 2:8-15

I. Be Confident in God's Word and Do Not Put Your Trust in Man's

- A. *See that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception* (2:8a)
The responsibility to avoid being led astray is ours. We are to see to it that we are not led astray. And notice: When one is led astray, he is held captive – trapped. The means by which we are led astray is men's ideas – here called *philosophy* and *empty deception*. This warning would not have been necessary if 1) the Colossians were not already falling prey, and 2) if it were not possible for Christians to be led astray in this manner.
- B. *In accordance with the traditions of men, and elementary principles of the world* (2:8b)
The most common deceptions for Christians to get led astray in are those which are in keeping with the natural way that man operates, the basic world principles that people assume. This is so foundational (elemental). The reason Christians will always be "called out ones" ("ekklesia" – ek (out) + kaleo (call) in Greek, the word for church) is because the world "lies in the power of the evil one" (1 Jn. 5:19) and its thinking is at cross purposes with God's ("word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing," 1 Cor. 1:18). Ephesians 2:2 says, "we formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." When we are young Christians, we tend to take what we've been taught by the world, and what God teaches us, and put them together. Our worldview is naturally a compendium of whatever we have been exposed to, and even if we are a Christian, there are ways the world thinks that are part of us that we don't even necessarily see. About so many things. An otherwise mature and godly person said to me this week, "I told her she needed to talk to someone and find out where her anger came from, what caused it?" A young Christian who is very committed to Christ said recently, "I know that we have been taught that practicing homosexuality is wrong, but I wonder if some of the people who are Christians who have a different perspective maybe have something we need to hear." A sincere and committed otherwise mature Christian said to me not long ago, "This has ruined my life." Each statement is in accordance with the principles and traditions of the world.
- C. *Rather than according to Christ* (2:8c)
Here Paul brings it back full circle: All our thinking should be in accordance with Christ. He says in 2 Cor. 10:5, "hold all thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ." And in Romans 12:2, "And be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him, and He will direct your path." Proverbs 16:25 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death." Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all else." Here in 2:8c, we see that God's ways are not like man's ways (Isa. 55:8), and we get suckered. Here the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul tells us we are easily misdirected.

II. The Reason We Don't Want to Get Snookered (2:9-10)

A. In Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form (2:9)

There is no stronger statement in the Bible of Jesus' deity (see also Hebrews 1:1-13 and Colossians 1:15-19 and John 1:1-5). You would think that Jesus' deity is not at issue for Christians – back then or now. Jesus was portrayed by many convincing proofs to be the Son of God – both by eyewitnesses in the days when Paul wrote Colossians, and in our day through the Word. Surely Christians have that settled.

But if so, why is Paul again addressing Christ's deity for the second time in less than 40 verses? And why is it important in our enlightened era where all Christians KNOW that Jesus is God? Well, when it comes to the reason people believe whatever they believe*, and we are including Christians here, the reason is much too often, "*what seems true to them in their experience*" or "*what influential people have said is so*" or "*what most people seem to believe.*" That is, even born again believers in Christ often determine what they believe based on everything except what it should be.

The most fundamental reason a Christian should hold fast to something as truth is because the son of God, Jesus, the "fullness of deity in bodily form," the One who knows all things, the Word of God, has declared these things so. No other proof (visions or philosophy) should be required. If Jesus is God, why would we need additional revelation/information about how to live and how to relate with Him and with each other than what He gave us? When we think, "I have a real problem here. I need something more than just Jesus to see me through it," we have not taken serious thought about who He is. God of very God. How could I need something more than Him? How could I think of Him as merely a means to an end (I want Jesus for what He gives me) rather than the end Himself?

B. And in Him you have been made complete (2:10a)

Well, now, the only thing we could call amazing after reading a description of Jesus as God of very God (fullness of deity in a body), is to read that, "IN HIM YOU HAVE BEEN MADE COMPLETE." How is that? I don't feel complete. I feel like I need more wisdom, more patience, more skill, more money, more health, more self-control and a thousand other things. But according to what God the Holy Spirit wanted conveyed by Paul to this group of Christians in Colossae is they, "have already been made complete in Christ." If that is true, their greatest need is not more information or ability, but to learn how to appropriate what is already true about them in Christ. This statement of our completeness in Christ echoes something Peter wrote a bit later in 2 Peter 1:3. There we read, "*You have been given all things necessary for life and godliness through the true knowledge of Christ.*" That means you already have received all you need to experience a victorious life (he is not talking here about biological life or even being born again, rather he is talking about ABUNDANT LIFE).

Many people who know Christ feel as if "only their son would follow Christ" or "if only they had a job they liked better" or "if only their retirement hadn't been chopped in half one year before retiring" or "if only they understood why God allowed this bad thing to happen," then they'd be ok, then they'd be whole, then they'd have hope and peace.

This verse argues against those as lies.

This verse says that if you are in Christ, you are complete. It doesn't mean you won't struggle or have sadness or experience some disappointment, but it does mean that the completeness we have been given in Christ actually satisfies our soul if we will learn to walk in it.

This verse tells the Christian who is waiting for deeper understanding or a more certain vision ("Jesus appeared to me and told me it is ok that _____ because He is doing something good in and through it") have put their hope in vanity. All they need to know is that they are in Christ, and because of that, they are complete. The challenge is now to walk by faith just like they were saved by faith.

- C. *And He is the head over all rule and authority.* (2:10b)

Not only is Christ fully God and not only have you been made complete by being in Him, He is the head of all authority. No human conjecture (philosophy or supposed wisdom) and no vision (wonders) are anything compared to Him who is the head over all. It is once again, as has been the case several times in Colossians, an echo of Hebrews 1. In verses 7-13, we read, "*And of the angels He says, 'WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE.'*" ***But of the Son He says, "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS."*** And, "***YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; THEY WILL PERISH, BUT YOU REMAIN; AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD LIKE A GARMENT, AND LIKE A MANTLE YOU WILL ROLL THEM UP; LIKE A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED. BUT YOU ARE THE SAME, AND YOUR YEARS WILL NOT COME TO AN END."*** *But to which of the angels has He ever said, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET"?*

- D. *In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.* (2:11-12)

Here Paul contrasts the physical sign of circumcision by which Jews were identified as being part of the covenant people of God with the spiritual circumcision that comes about when a person believes on Christ. Paul is making a kind of play on words here as he emphasizes the spiritual sufficiency of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and the means by which a person is placed into that reality by faith. This is why it is a circumcision without hands. Likewise, he plays on the words "removal of flesh" which is what a physical circumcision does, here thinking of "removal of flesh" in a spiritual way. That is, your placement into Christ by faith results in a heart circumcision – a new life – which is commemorated in baptism, where you are placed into his death and raised to a new life.

These two verses are Paul showing what it means that we have been made a recipient of the sufficiency of Christ. Circumcision removes flesh and spiritual rebirth circumcises the heart. Baptism, a similar sign of being part of the covenant people of God, signifies dying with Christ and being raised to a new life with Christ. (We'll see more of that in chapter 3.)

- III. What Happened Spiritually When You Were Saved?** (2:13-15)
- A. *When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh* (13a)
Paul again (see 1:21) reminds us that before Christ, we had no hope of righteousness. This is more important than it seems here, because he is building towards something.
 - B. *He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions* (13b)
He reminds us that God saved us. We are “passive voice” – *made alive* with Him. He also reminds us that *being brought back to life* and *being forgiven all our sins* are concurrent.
 - C. *Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us which was hostile to us, and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross* (14)
This wonderful verse explains what it really means to forgive us. He took every debt we owed Him, every sin of ours that was hostile and yelling at us, and nailed it to the cross, like a certificate of accusation, just like the Romans did with every crucified prisoner.
 - D. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through (not *Him*, but rather *it* = the cross). (15)
Here Paul reminds or teaches us that His crucifixion and resurrection had the effect of displaying God's victory over every ruler and authority in spiritual places.

IV. Discuss and Homework

- A. Discussion
 - 1. What examples of “philosophy characterized by deceptive emptiness” do you think currently take Christians captive? (v. 8)
 - 2. How does Jesus being “full deity and head over all authority” give you confidence in believing what you believe? Where is that hard for you? (vv. 9-10)
 - 3. What connection might there be between understanding and believing that we are “complete in Christ” (v. 10) and not being easily down on ourselves or hopeless?
 - 4. How are circumcision and baptism similar? Different? (vv. 11-12)
 - 5. Commands for Christians to follow in chapter 2 (thus far) are “*walk in Christ the same way you received Him*” and “*do not let yourself be taken captive by philosophy and men's traditions.*” Everything else in the chapter has to do with what God has already done. What might that tell you about the Christian life, if it is reflective of solid Christian sanctification doctrine (becoming like Christ)? (By the way, 1:9-10 tells me that is exactly Paul's goal in this book). (vv. 1-15)
- B. **Memorize verse 10**, “*In Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.*”
- C. Discuss at a meal or two this week however many of the questions listed for discussion you can, since it is highly likely that today's class will not have time to discuss them!

*Appendix: What People Believe

George Barna, 1998 Poll

1. First number listed is all people polled
2. (Second number) was people who agreed with the statement, *“I believe that I am a sinner, that Jesus died for me on the cross and was raised from the dead, and that He offered eternal life to all who believe.”*
 - 44% (30%) believe Jesus committed some sin/s
 - 40% (35%) believe Jesus did not have a literal, physical resurrection
 - 58% do not know that Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount
 - 80% believe that people are basically good
 - 52% (40%) believe you can earn heaven by being good
 - 60% believe that Satan is a symbol and not a real being (51%) – the same number believes that about the Holy Spirit (55%)
 - 34% believe that some sins can not be forgiven by God
 - 65% believe all people pray to the same God
 - 33% do not believe in the God revealed by the Bible
 - 81% believe the Bible declares that “God helps those who help themselves”
 - 87% (81%) do not know what the Great Commission is
 - 40% believe that all religions teach essentially the same thing
 - 50% believe that the book of Thomas is in the New Testament
 - 40% believe the whole Bible was written years after Jesus’ death
 - 72% (67%) believe there is no absolute moral truth